

## Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 NEAE-00 SSM-03 IO-13 CIAE-00  
DODE-00 NSAE-00 NSCE-00 SSO-00 USIE-00 INRE-00  
ACDA-12 PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15  
EUR-12 HA-05 /093 W

-----073226 211742Z /46

P R 210520Z MAR 78

FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7299

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

USINT BAGHDAD

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

USLO RIYADH

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 1573

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PEPR, PLO, IS, SY

SUBJECT: PLO INTENTIONS

1. SUMMARY: PALESTINIANS ARE REPORTEDLY ELATED AT COURSE OF RECENT EVENTS IN WHICH THEY HAVE DEMONSTRATED ABILITY TO STRIKE DEEP IN ISRAELI AND CREDIBLY STAND UP TO IDF WITHOUT DIRECT HELP OF ANY ARAB STATE. PLO'S PERFORMANCE HAS UNIFIED MOVEMENT, REDUCED INFLUENCE OF ARAB STATES OVER IT AND ENCOURAGED TERRORISTS TO THINK IN TERMS OF FURTHER OPERATIONS IN ISRAEL AFTER UN FORCE IS INSERTED IN SOUTH LEBANON. ASSAD SEEMS INTENT ON INCREASING HIS CONTROL OVER PALESTINIANS IN LEBANON, BUT IN THEIR NEW EXUBERANCE THIS MAY BE DIFFICULT. IF PLO CAN STRIKE ISRAEL REGARDLESS OF UN BUFFER, IDF WILL HAVE LIMITED OPTIONS FOR RETALIATION, UNLESS IT IS PREPARED TO RISK CONFLICT WITH ADF A CONFLICT WHICH  
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NEITHER APPEARS TO DESIRE. END SUMMARY.

2. PALESTINIANS HAVE REPORTEDLY BEEN GREATLY BUOYED BY RECENT EVENTS IN ISRAEL AND SOUTH LEBANON. ONE PALESTINIAN SOURCE, WHO HAS CLOSE FRIENDSHIPS WITH MANY TOP PLO LEADERS AND HAS BEEN DISCUSSING SITUATION WITH HIS WELL-INFORMED FRIENDS, SAID THAT MOST SIGNIFICANT ASPECT OF FIGHTING IN SOUTH

LEBANON IS THAT THIS IS FIRST TIME IN HISTORY OF MOVEMENT THAT PALESTINIANS ARE TAKING ON THE IDF ALONE IN A SUSTAINED MANNER AND PERFORMING CREDIBLY WITHOUT THE DIRECT HELP OF ANY ARAB STATE. IDF OPERATION HAS DONE AT LEAST TEMPORARILY FOR PALESTINIANS WHAT THEY COULD NOT DO ON THEIR OWN. A) IT HAS UNIFIED THE MOVEMENT--FORMER COMPETITORS ARE MINGLING THEIR BLOOD ON THE BATTLEFIELD IN SOUTH LEBANON WHILE PALESTINIANS IN THE WEST BANK ENGAGE IN SYMPATHETIC CLASHES WITH THE ISRAELI OCCUPYING FORCES; B) IT HAS RESTORED PALESTINIAN SELF-CONFIDENCE WHICH HAD BEEN EBBING AWAY; C) IT HAS REDUCED IMPORTANCE OF FACTIONAL TIES WITHIN PALESTINIAN MOVEMENT TO THEIR VARIOUS ARAB PATRONS, ALL OF WHICH HAVE STOOD BY WHILE ISRAEL ATTACKS THE PALESTINIANS (THE COROLLARY IS THAT ARAB STATES WILL HAVE LESS RESTRAINING INFLUENCE ON THE MOVEMENT IN THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE) AND D) IT HAS GIVEN PLO CREDIBILITY THROUGHOUT THE WORLD AS ORGANIZATION WHICH CAN AFFECT THE COURSE OF HISTORY IN THE AREA AND WHICH MUST BE LISTENED TO IF PEACE IS TO BE ATTAINED IN THE REGION (SOURCE ASSUMES PLO ACTION HAS ELIMINATED ANY HOPE FOR ISRAELI-EGYPTIAN NEGOTIATIONS)

3. PALESTINIAN CLAIMED THAT PLO CAN CONTINUE TO NIBBLE AWAY AT IDF WHILE IT REMAINS IN LEBANON. HE BELIEVES THAT ISRAELI CASUALTIES HAVE BEEN GREATER THAN IDF HAS ADMITTED PUBLICLY AND THAT IT HAS PUT BODIES IN COLD STORAGE TO RELEASE SLOWLY OVER COMING PERIOD. (WHETHER TRUE OR NOT, FACT IS THAT PALESTINIANS BELIEVE THEY ARE PERFORMING CREDITABLE CONFIDENTIAL

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IN LEBANON AND ARE HURTING THE ISRAELIS.) POLOFF ASKED WHAT WOULD BE EFFECT OF INTERPOSING UN FORCE. PALESTINIAN CLAIMED IT WOULD HAVE NO EFFECT SINCE PLO WOULD REDOUBLE EFFORTS TO MOUNT OPERATIONS AGAINST ISRAELI CIVILIANS INSIDE ISRAEL. CIVILIANS, HE CLAIMED, ARE ONLY VIABLE TARGET FOR SMALL PLO RAIDING PARTY AND "ALL ISRAELIS, IN UNIFORM OR NOT, SERVE IN IDF AND ARE THE ENEMY." HE CITED ABILITY OF LAST FATAH RAIDING PARTY TO CENTER ISRAEL UNDETECTED AS EVIDENCE THAT PALESTINIANS ARE NOW BETTER TRAINED AND THAT ISRAEL WILL NOT BECOME IMPREGNABLE REGARDLESS OF SITUATION IN SOUTH LEBANON.

4. THIS SOURCE WAS VERY PLEASED WITH US EFFORTS IN PRESENT CRISIS WHICH HE SAYS WERE PURSUED WITHOUT ISRAELI AGREEMENT. ISRAEL NOW FACED WITH A FAIT ACCOMPLI OF UN FORCE WHICH WILL ENSURE LEBANESE SOVEREIGNTY, DETER IDF GROUND ACTION IN LEBANON, BUT WILL NOT HALT PLO ACTS AGAINST ISRAEL. PALESTINIAN POINTED OUT THAT NEITHER ISRAEL NOR UN HAD EVER BEEN ABLE TO STOP PLO. ONLY ARAB COUNTRIES, EGYPT, JORDAN, AND SYRIA, HAVE BEEN ABLE TO EFFECTIVELY CLOSE BORDERS TO PALESTINIAN OPERATIONS AND THIS HAS BEEN POSSIBLE ONLY BECAUSE LEBANON WAS LEFT OPEN AS BASE FOR OPERATIONS. POINT

IS ONE WHICH PLO WANTS TO MAKE VERY CLEAR TO WORLD:  
ONLY BY SATISFYING MINIMAL PALESTINIAN DEMANDS CAN ISRAEL  
FIND SECURITY.

5. ASKED ABOUT PNC MEETING DUE IN MARCH, SOURCE SAID THAT  
IT WILL CONTINUE TO BE DELAYED. ONLY POSSIBLE OUTCOME OF  
PNC MEETING AT THIS POINT WOULD BE AFFIRMATION OF PALESTINIAN  
TRIPOLI AGREEMENT WHICH IS TOO INFLEXIBLE FOR THE DOMINANT  
MODERATE LEADERSHIP WHICH STILL ENTERTAINS HOPE OF LEADING  
PALESTINIANS INTO NEGOTIATIONS.

6. ASSAD, FOR HIS PART, ACCORDING TO SEVERAL REPORTS WE HAVE  
HEARD OVER LAST FEW DAYS, IS FURIOUS OVER UNCOORDINATED  
PLO ACTION IN ISRAEL AND IS NOW GRAPPLING WITH MEANS TO BRING  
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PALESTINIANS UNDER GREATER CONTROL FOR FUTURE. LOCAL NEWSMAN  
CLAIMS THAT DELIBERATIONS IN DAMASCUS MARCH 19-20 AMONG  
STEADFASTNESS FRONT MINISTERS OF DEFENSE AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
WERE IN PART STIMULATED BY SARG TO ELICIT LIBYAN AND ALGERIAN  
HELP IN BRINGING PLO TO HEEL.

7. IF MOOD AMONG PALESTINIANS IS ACCURATELY REFLECTED BY OUR  
SOURCE, ASSAD WILL HAVE TROUBLE TRYING TO EXERT EFFECTIVE  
CONTROL OVER PLO IN LEBANON. NOR WILL ASSAD BE READY TO MAKE A  
SERIOUS TRY IN THIS RESPECT AND TAKE THE ONUS ON HIMSELF OF  
CURTAILING PLO OPERATIONS IF OTHER ARABS STATES  
CHEER THE PLO ON FROM THE SIDELINES. IT SOUNDS REASONABLE TO  
US TO ASSUME THE POL IS IN LESS OF MOOD TO LISTEN TO VOICES  
OF RESTRAINT AND IS, FOR NOW, COMMITTED TO SHOWING "BANKRUPTCY"  
OF ISRAELI POLICIES RE SECURITY AND PALESTINIANS. IT  
REMAINS TO BE SEEN HOW EFFECTIVE  
PLO WILL BE BUT WE ARE CONCERNED THAT OUR SOURCE IS ACCURATELY  
RELATING POL PERCEPTIONS AND INTENTIONS. IF PLO CAN OPERATE  
IN ISRAEL FROM BASES IN LEBANON IN SPITE OF UN FORCE, IDE, NOW  
DENIED FREE FIRE SAFETY VALVE IN SOUTH LEBNOM,  
MAY BE INCLINED TO LEAPFROG OVER UN BUFFER INTO LEBANON WITH  
ATTENDANT DANGER OF ENGAGING ADF. THERE IS A LIMIT TO HOW  
OFTEN THE ADF CAN RUN FROM A FIGHT, EVEN IF IT IS ONE  
WHICH NEITHER DAMASCUS NOR JERUSALEM MAY SEEK.  
MURPHY

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NNN



## Message Attributes

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**Channel Indicators:** n/a  
**Current Classification:** UNCLASSIFIED  
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